

# USHAO

Electronic Edition  
Volume I, No. 2 \* Summer 2009

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## “May Tishtrya's rain bring fruition to our fields”

Tiregan or Jashn-e Tiregan is an ancient Iranian rain festival, observed on 1 July. Tir in modern Persian; Tishtar in Middle Persian or Pahlavi; and Tishtrya in Avestan, is the yazad (angel) associated with rain and fertility. Yasht 8 tells the story of how Tishtrya, in the form of a pure white horse with golden ears and a golden tail, fought a cosmic struggle against the drought-bringing demon Apaosha, who assumed the form of a terrorizing black horse. After three days and three nights of battle, Apaosha gained the upper hand over Tishtrya, who was weakened from the lack of prayers from the humans he looked after. The yazata turned to Ahura Mazda for help. Thus, Tishtrya was able to overcome Apaosha, and rain fell on the parched land and harvests were once again bountiful.

Tishtriya, or Tir yazad as the Parsi refer to him, is, therefore, invoked by farmers to enhance harvest and counter drought. In *Homage Unto Ahura Mazda*, Dastur M.N. Dhalla writes;

Thou, Ahura Mazda, hast created Tishtrya, the radiant, glorious star genius of the rain, the lord of all other stars, for the fertility of the fields and farms and all other lands. Men and beasts and birds and plants and trees and rivers and streams and thirsty earth look eagerly and entreatingly to the rising of the star Tishtrya, that, in gushing torrents, he may send a flood of rain to fertilize their lands and bestow riches upon the earth. The farmer yearns for the refreshing showers of Tishtrya to water his parched fields, the gardener looks for a shower to brighten the foliage. With rich harvests does the land smile, when the rain Yazata favors it with his fertilizing waters. The drops of the rain of Tishtrya are like watery seeds that the benevolent sky scatters over the fields and spreads fertility all around.

Hail unto Tishtrya who rains his fertilizing blessings over the earth. The fields do smile and trees do rejoice and the animals are gladdened. To the sound of the patter of raindrops on the leaves of the trees do the birds sing their melodious songs. Let us then sing to the greatness and glory of the lord our God and pray unto him in thankfulness.

Tishtriya (or Tir yazad) is also considered a healing angel. As immunity to infection is lowered during famines, leading to illnesses and death, this explains why he is invoked by Parsis at times of sickness and epidemics. \*\*

## Star Light, Star Bright

Tishtrya is also associated with the Dog Star, Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky. The reason for this is that two thousand five hundred years ago, the heliacal rising of Sirius was in July (it now occurs in August), the hottest and driest month of the year in Iran at that time, and droughts were common. For the first few days, Sirius is visible as a glimmering star only at dawn. As Sirius becomes more directly visible, the light of the star appears to grow stronger and is related to the legend as Tishtrya gathering strength. When it becomes steadily visible it is seen as Apaosha vanquished to coincide with autumn rains.

After the Zarathushtrian refugees settled in Gujrat, India, where the monsoon rains fell in summer, and “Tir yazad”, as the Parsis referred to him, became associated with stars in general rather than one specific star. The Parsi-Zarathushtrians held their wedding ceremony after sunset to honour the commitment they had made to Jadev Rana, the king who gave them refuge when they fled Iran, that they would be a peacable community that would assimilate into the local environment and not unduly flaunt their different rituals. Priests and wedding parties would wait till it became dark enough to see “Tir yazad”, or the first star in the night sky, before taking out the wedding procession.\*\*



Sirius in 2002 – Observer Till Credner

## Legend of the Swift Arrow

The Tiregan festival is also associated with the legend of the arrow ('tir'), which is briefly alluded to in the Tishtar Yasht (Yt8.6):

We honor the bright, khwarrah-endowed star Tishtrya who flies as swiftly to the Vouru-kasha sea as the supernatural arrow which the archer Erexsha, the best archer of the Iranians, shot from Mount Airyo-xshutha to Mount Xwanwant. For Ahura Mazda gave him assistance; so did the waters ...

This brief mention sparked many versions of the story such as the ones depicted in *The History of Persia Containing the Lives and Memorable Actions of its Kings* written in Arabic by Mirkond and translated into English by Antony Teixeira in 1715, the Persian Rivayats, and in oral traditions of retelling the story. However, the basic storyline remains the same. Ereksha Khshviwi-ishush (known as Arash-i

Shiwâtir in Pahlavi i.e. 'Arash of the swift arrow, and known as Arash-e Kamângir in modern Persian) was the best archer in the Iranian army.

In ancient times, Iran and Turan were traditional enemies ever since the time king Faridoon gave the rich and verdant land of his kingdom to his favourite son Iraj instead of the oldest son, Tur, to whom he gave the neighbouring, less prosperous land. Generations later, Manouchehr, King of Iran, and Afrasiyab, King of Turan, decided to make peace after eight years of war in which Turan suffered a crippling drought. They agreed to fix the boundary between Iran and Turan wherever an arrow shot by Arash would fall.



*A statue of Arash e Kamangir outside the White palace at the Kakhe Sa'd Abad Museum, Tehran.*

The legend continues that the angel Asfandaramad (Av. Spenta Armaiti) gifted a special bow and arrow to Arash. Just before the sun rose on the 13th day of the month Tir, Arash climbed the highest peak of the Alborz range, Mount Damavand, said a prayer to Ahura Mazda and shot his arrow towards Turan with all his might. The effort he put into this feat took his strength and he collapsed and died. The arrow flew from dawn till noon to finally land somewhere near Amu Darya (Oxus River in what is now Central Asia) which was within Turan. Although he had lost some of his land to Iran as a result of the agreement, Afrasiyab honoured his word and the river became the boundary between Iran and Turan. A week later, rains came down and the people of Turan rejoiced, and peace flourished between the two countries. Iran decided to mark the occasion with a festival on the day Tir of the month Tir. The priests developed an Afrainagân or Jashan ceremony dedicated to Tir. They would write the Nirang, and tie it on the wrists of the faithful. A week later people would remove the bands and throw them into the sea. This has evolved into the modern day custom in Iran of tying rainbow-colored bands, which are worn for ten days and then thrown into a stream to signify washing away strife and calamities.

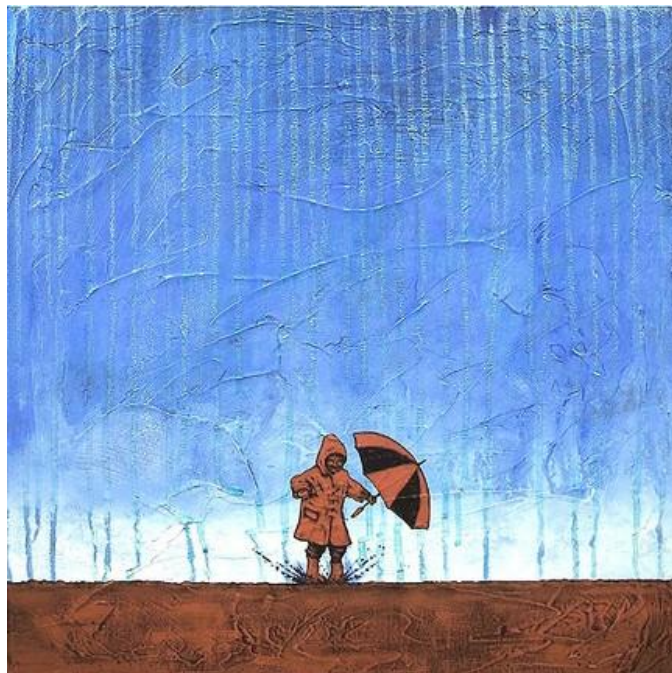
The Tiregan celebrations may have roots in Zarathushtrian scripture, but flourish in a non-Zarathushtrian culture. Writing about the Tiregan in *Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, Mary Boyce (cited on [www.avesta.org](http://www.avesta.org)) mentioned a game of Moradula ('bead-pot') or chokâdula ('fate-pot'). Shireen Simmons, in her book *Treasury of Persian Cuisine*, describes the game, "Two or three days before Tiregan it was the custom to collect together various items such as rings, bracelets, chains in precious metal or artifacts of wrought iron such as a key or a lock. Each one was named after a member of the family and placed in a pottery pot (Koozeh) filled with water, covered with cloth and tied with string, then placed under sweet pomegranate or fruit tree to rest for several days. On the actual day of Tir when the temperatures reaches over forty degrees centigrade everyone will hide bowls, jars and buckets of water behind the wall or on their balconies. Any Zoroastrian passers by – women, children, or men leaving for office - are showered. The sound of laughter and giggles filled every corner of the street.

Everyone has several changes of clothes until late afternoon, when the sun becomes pale. Then the pot was taken from under the tree and taken into the house. A young girl who had not yet reached puberty was chosen, and each person took turns to sing or say a poem as each item was pulled out symbolizing the future of the person. The joyful day would end with dinner in the garden with the traditional dish of *shooly* (sic), spinach and beetroot soup. Tambourine music and handkerchief music continued into the evening.” Boyce observed during her time in Sharif-Âbâd that many of the charming old Tiregan customs had died away by the 1960's leaving "merry-making by young people and children, who with a happy license...splash and duck one another in the village streams." As with all great festivals, food is an important part of Tiregan festival in Iran. Spinach soup and a saffron pudding, *shooleh zard*, is eaten during this festival. \*\*

### Summer Rain

Gerald Fisher

Father Sky is gray  
As the new light appears  
And the laughter of the birds is still  
the clouds shed their tears  
and the land drinks of this heavenly dew  
puddles replace the dust  
irresistible temptations for little feet  
Turning my face to the sky  
and feeling the gentleness of the mist  
washing away my cares  
filling my heart with happiness  
Lifting my spirits  
like the quenching of the crops  
Raising my arms  
I turn to the four winds  
and give thanks for this  
gentle summer rain.



Puddles – A Limited Edition Art Print

## Open Doors at Sayajigunj

In the spring of this year, Parsis of Vadodara, Gujrat, India, created waves when they decided to open doors of the the Maiyat Khan Saheb Faramji Kawasji Adariyan and Dharamshala and its Nibhau Fund run in Sayajigunj to the public. The decision to do so has been on the cards since 1998 when the agiary underwent a complete renovation for its diamond jubilee in February 1999. The sacred fire preserved in the premises was shifted to a neighbouring building and many non-Zarathushtrian workers came in and out of the agiary. The recent decision was made after a senior member from the community, Firoz Wadia, felt that the restoration the historical building built in 1924 would be seen only by a handful of

community members. He thought it should be made open for the public at least for a small duration of time. Unfortunately, Wadia died soon after and the idea was discussed among the trustees of the agiary, who decided to fulfil his wish and open it to the public on Sundays.

"The holy fire has been shifted to another hall in the same premises. We are aware about the religious sentiments and we will follow all the necessary precautions," said Nikitin Contractor, one of the trustees of the agiary. However, the decision created ripples within the larger community. Darius Master of the Surat Parsi Panchayat said, "The Parsi Panchayat is nowhere concerned with the issue because decisions like these are taken only by the religious priests. If it is so, then it will certainly invite a debate at the national level because our religion strictly restricts people who are non-Parsis from entering the holy place. If I am not wrong, then persons organising such events would be questioned by the religious priests." Contractor, however, said that his Trust has the full power to take the decision concerned with the Sayajigunj Parsi Agiary. "It is not that during the restoration we allowed people to enter, but we have decided to organise a special event to let people come close to our community, and understand us. I have not faced any problem from within the community while going ahead with this idea," he said.

Although, the idea is unusual for Parsis of Gujrat, it is not unusual for Zarathushtrians living in Iran or North America. Even in cases where the fire burning in the daremeher (see next article for definitions of agiary and daremeher) is consecrated, the Trustees ensure that the area is restricted and the non-Zarathushtrians only visit the public areas like the community halls and places of ablution. In 2000, the City of Toronto, Canada, launched the first Doors Open event in North America. In this annual event held in May over 175 buildings of architectural, historic, cultural and/or social significance open their doors to the public and admission is free. In 2007, Mehraban Guiv Darbe Meher became a part of the annual Doors Open event. The description in the program read, "Tour the spiritual home of the

Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (since 1978) and learn about this ancient religion. Shoes are to be removed and heads are to be covered prior to entering the prayer room. This Tudor Revival mansion overlooking a wooded ravine was a former residence of famed Canadian author Mazo de la Roche from 1939 to 1945. It has been home to the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario since 1978. The property was purchased in 1978 by philanthropist Arbab Rustom Guiv and gifted to the Zoroastrian Community of Ontario for use as their temple and is named after his late nephew Mehraban Guiv. The estate serves as a Zoroastrian house of worship and exemplifies a Tudor Revival style architecture overlooking a wooded ravine. The home features several original interior features that date from its construction in 1922. In spite of major extensions and alterations made to the front, side and rear, the building has been a compromise in function and accommodation as a Zoroastrian Temple. Architect, David Oleson of Oleson Worland Architects has prepared plans to build the first designed Zoroastrian Temple in Canada,



2008 Doors Open at Mehraban Guiv Darbe Meher, Toronto

incorporating castings from Persepolis (600BCE). The new temple design (on display) will enrich Toronto's multicultural diversity, with a heritage spanning 3700 years and preserve the natural landscape of the property and commemorate the author. It will be Toronto's "temple in the park". Visitors will learn about the history and the planned evolution of the Mehraban Guiv Darbe Mehr – Zoroastrian Temple, which is the sacred space of the first monotheistic faith, in the annals of mankind. They will be transported back to a time centuries before the birth of Christ, to experience and examine the legacy of a belief and culture that has played an influential role in the faith history of humanity. The traditions and culture of the followers of the faith, who have over the centuries preserved the character and integrity of their ancient religion, will be on display to visitors. They will tour the prayer room and see rituals performed by our young priests (mobeds), and view a video presentation in the main assembly hall, that portrays the traditional initiation (Navzote) and the wedding ceremonies and parts of a Jashan (religious celebration). They will see various displays, including a traditional table laid out to celebrate Naurooz the Zoroastrian New Year day (vernal equinox). Visitors can enjoy the Parsi and Iranian children's choir in Gujarati and Farsi and hear short commentaries, that explain the history and traditions of Zoroastrianism a religion that has survived nearly 3700 years."

Source: Various internet sources.

## Agiary, Daremeher – What's The Difference?

Zarathushtrian places of worship are classified according the grade of fire housed within them. There are three grades of fires - Atash Dadgah, Atash Adaran, and Atash Behram. Atash Dadgah is the home or hearth fire, which can be tended by a lay person. Atash Adaran or the "fire of fires" is consecrated from fires from the homes of four professional groups and requires a priest to tend it. The highest grade of fire is the Atash Behram, "fire of victory", consecrated from 16 different kinds of fire, including fire from lightning and a funeral pyre. Each of the 16 fires undergoes a purification ritual before it joins the others and 32 priests are required for the consecration ceremony, which can take up to a year to complete. There are only nine Atash Behrams in the world, one in Iran and eight in India.

### AGIARY



*Sorabji Thoothi Agiary at Walkeshwar, built in 1859, celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.*

An agiary (agiari, agiyari) simply means a house or place where the fire is kept. It is an Indian word – agni ari – which has been changed in Gujarati to agiary. It is a term that can be applied to all three grades of fire — even the Iranshah in Udwada can and has been referred to as an agiary, without diminishing its exalted status. Hight Priest, Dastur Firoze Kotwal confirms the same. "The term 'agiary' as a common term is used for all three categories of fire. The Sanjan Atash Behram is called 'Atashni Agiary' in old documents by Sanjana priests who tended the Atash Behram in Navsari."

The Iranian term “atash kadeh” is the corresponding equivalent to agiary in India. Thus for example, in 1823 William Ouseley noted that there were ruins of an ancient fire Temple on a hill near Isphahan, which was known as Kuh e Atash Kadeh “the Hill of the Fire-temple”. In *A Literary History of Persia*, Edward G. Browne, describes a place that he noticed in 1888 as “a curiously shaped hill called the Atash-gah, on which, as its name implies, there is said to exist a ruined Fire-temple.”

In India, by general usage of language, the term agiary has now come to become synonymous with the third grade of fire i.e. the dadgah. A person praying in an unfamiliar agiary may have to ask someone beforehand as to the category of fire housed therein to make the appropriate selection when reciting the Atash Niyash. In most cases it is a dadgah fire.



*Ruins of Kuh e Atash Kadeh,  
Isphahan*

### **DAR-E-MEHER**

The term Dar-e-Meher (Dar-i-Meher) is of Iranian origin. The term is made up of Dar (Avesta dvara, Sanskrit dvara, German Thur or Thor, English door) and Meher which is a later form of the Avesta Mithra. So the term generally means the door or the porch of Mithra. In Zoroastrian angelology, Meher is the Yazata presiding over light and justice. At one time in history, fire temples were the seat of justice similar to the courts of today. Even at the present time, in predominantly Hindu India many legal documents have the word “Mitra” reverently inscribed at the top of the page.

According to Mary Boyce, during the reign of Shah Abbas the Great (1587 – 1628) in Kerman, there were evidently still some Zoroastrians of substance who were able to give generously in charity. In 1858, a Persian inscription was discovered “in flowery verse” on an “elegantly carved” marble slab in an old building of a Dar-e-Mehr at Kerman which had remained unnoticed and neglected until then. That inscription was transcribed, translated and interpreted by Professor Mary Boyce. According to the inscription, the Dar-e-Mehr (Khane-yi Mihr) was erected by one Rustom of Bundar, son of Mihragan. The inscription records that he erected “this place of worship at his own costs for pious prayers”. The inscription praises Shah Abbas who is mentioned along with Faridun and Noshirvan. This is because Shah Abbas is still gratefully remembered by the Zoroastrians in Kerman and Yazd for protecting them from the harshness of local governors.

According to JJ Modi, fire-temples generally have a place or a set of apartments attached to them for the performance of inner liturgical ceremonies. These special places came to be known at first as the Dar-e-Mehr. Even though these places are attached to the temple itself and are actually a part of the main fire temple, it came to be that the whole religious building including the main chamber of the sacred fire came to be called the Dar-e-Mehr. It must be noted that all fire-temples do not necessarily have the apartments for the performance of the inner liturgical services attached to them. For example

the Atash Behram at Navsari does not have the Dar-e-Mehr attached to it, but is in a separate building. This is more the exception than the rule and, therefore, generally speaking the entire complex is sometimes referred to as the Dar-e-Mehr. But more often than not, a Dar-e-Mehr is usually used for the sacred fire of the third grade.

The term Darbe-Mehr (or more correctly Darb-e-Mehr) is unfamiliar to Parsi Zarathushtrians from the



*Dar e Meher, Shiraz*

Indian sub-continent. According to Dasturji Kotwal, “The word ‘darb’ is an older form derived from the Avestan word ‘dvar’, and it is more preferable than the later form ‘dar’ which we Parsis generally use. The letter ‘b’ is dropped in later languages such as Pahlavi and Persian, whereas it is retained by the Parsis of Iran in their colloquial language, showing affinity with the Av. letter ‘v’ in ‘dvar’. The Dar-e Mehr attached to the Navsari Atash Bahram is meant solely for the ceremonies performed by the Boewaras in connection with the Atash Bahram for retaining the Khub or ritual Amal. The famous Vadi Dar-e Mehr is used exclusively by the Bhagaria priests for all Pawmahal ceremonies commissioned by the community.”

According to Dastur Kotwal, “It is better to call a place of worship in which there is no permanently burning fire a Darb-e-Mehr or Dar-e-Mehr, i.e., the Court of the Lord of Rituals, since rituals are generally performed in the Hawan Gah which is presided over by Mehr Yazad. There is no Agiary in India which does not house a consecrated fire in the Gumbad for general worship. However, old Agiarys of Gujarat did not house, in the beginning years, a consecrated fire. It should be remembered that all Agiarys in India have Dadgah fires in the Urwisgah for ritual purposes and a fire of any of the three categories in the Gumbad as a fire of worship for devotees as a medium to send their messages to Ahura Mazda.”

In the North American context, the preferred course would be to call any place of Zararhushtrian worship a Darbe Meher (or Dar-e-Meher). As the name agiary is of Indian origin and is interchangeably applied to all three grades of fire, it is best to avoid it for the unnecessary confusion that it causes, and also because it is not a familiar term to Zarathushtrians from outside the Indian subcontinent. \*\*

Source : Extracted from *The Typology of A Parsi Fire Temple* compiled from various sources for The Informal Adult Classes on Zoroastrian Religion & History, by Keki B. Shroff, Toronto, Canada. Photos, unless referenced, are from Internet sources.



*Mehraban Guiv Darbe Meher, Toronto – photo by Fredoon Khory*